

UNIVERSITY IN TRANSITION: FACULTY SENSE-MAKING AND RESPONSES

LESLIE D. GONZALES

Clemson University

RODOLFO RINCONES

University of Texas El Paso

Across the institutional spectrum, universities are attempting to reposition themselves as more research dominant institutions, a pattern referred to as “mission creep.” Such changes in university missions have several critical implications for faculty members and their work. In this qualitative study, we interviewed ten tenure-track faculty members to explore how they make sense of and respond to Sun University’s creeping university mission. Through qualitative data analysis, we found that faculty use organizational scripts to construct and make sense of their role, yet they do so towards different ends. Some faculty members own the transition and attempt to contribute to its success, while others negotiate the transition by mobilizing these very same scripts. Finally, a third subgroup resists the transition to research status altogether by using the organizational scripts in different ways. Ultimately, this study shows the importance of organizational scripts as faculty members used them in disparate ways to carry out the personal ambition and hopes that faculty often have for their work.

Keywords: faculty work; legitimacy; organizational change; organizational scripts

The professoriate is consistently described as an institution in flux (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Scholarship on the professoriate has traced the expansion of the faculty role (Fairweather, 2002; Musselin, 2007), as well as the simultaneous erosion of faculty’s professional authority (Slaughter & Rhoades, 1997). Most recently, Tuchman (2009) documented how administrators, seeking increased prestige for their aspiring research university, made top-down revisions to curriculum and programming without faculty knowledge or consent.

Tuchman’s (2009) work is one example of how expanding faculty roles and the simultaneous loss of control over one’s professorial career are often consequences attached to an increasing trend called “mission creep.” Mission creep is a process by which universities and colleges attempt to break away from their historical, teaching-focused mission in order to adopt a research mission, which is conceived as more prestigious in the higher education field (Longanecker, 2008; Morphew, 2009). As leaders attempt to reposition their regional teaching universities, there are serious implications for faculty and their work (Fairweather, 2002, 2005; Melguizo & Strober, 2007) since the faculty is primarily responsible for the implementation of the university’s academic mission. Most studies on mission creep, however, have focused on the organization, leaving the faculty perspective and experience largely unexplored (Morphew, 2002).

PURPOSE

To study this important untapped perspective, we spent ten months in the field carrying out interviews, collecting secondary sources, and attending events at Sun University, an aspiring research university in west Texas. Specifically, we conducted interviews with ten tenure-line faculty members to better understand how they made sense of Sun’s transition. We also investigated how these faculty members navigated and responded to this dramatic transition.

Grounded in qualitative data, we believe this study affords administrators an up-close understanding of how faculty members view and respond to mission creep at Sun University. Although not generalizable, the faculty stories are situated in rich contextual data so that readers can draw parallels between the Sun University faculty experience

and their own experiences, either as leaders of, or faculty inside, a creeping university.

Finally, because our work investigates this increasingly common pattern of mission creep at the faculty level, we see it is a contribution to the scholarship on contemporary faculty work and life. As Rhoades (2007) wrote, “[the higher education field] lacks sufficient case studies to help us better understand the concrete working conditions and experiences of faculty members in a higher education system that by all accounts is changing dramatically” (pp. 123-124). Mission creep is but one example of the dramatic changes that are unfolding in higher education. It is our hope that our work can fill some of the void to which Rhoades refers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studying Faculty Roles from the Macro Approach

There are several ways that one could go about investigating and explaining the faculty role. Indeed, there is an extensive body of scholarship which explains faculty work with a macro or structural lens. For instance, Slaughter (1985) and Slaughter and Rhodes (2005) have consistently linked the political-economy to faculty work and roles, arguing that the capitalist political economy has established an ideological and allocative environment that undermines higher education and faculty work as a public good. They argue that this neoliberal political-economy leads to an environment where faculty roles are deeply shaped by the organization’s necessity to survive in a hostile market-oriented economy. To survive, universities have adopted business-like practices, including the expansion of a managerial line whose purpose is to manage the professionals (faculty). This body of literature consistently points to the weakening of faculty governance, retrenchment, and the marketization of knowledge, especially through copyright and patenting practices. It also depicts faculty members as co-opted professionals without agency. In short, faculty members are conceptualized as capitalists, selling the goods of their “academic labor/research,” pushing teaching aside in order to survive and maximize personal benefits.

Studying Faculty Work from the Meso Approach

When Ernest Boyer (1990), former president of The Carnegie Foundation, began to lecture about the need to reconsider the traditional definition of scholarship to include practical application as well as teaching, he threw the field of higher education into a whirlwind discussion of reform (Fairweather, 2005). Eugene Rice was tapped to lead an important series of forums referred to as the “Faculty Roles and Rewards,” where higher education scholars discussed the challenges that expanding scholarship presented, and, more importantly, to concoct policy solutions for the identified barriers. Almost a decade later, Carnegie commissioned a study to evaluate to what extent universities had “expanded” their definition of scholarship.

This evaluative study, led by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997), consisted of a large cross-section of universities where the researchers reviewed faculty hand-books and tenure and promotion guidelines and then interviewed or surveyed top ranking university leaders. Glassick et al. (1997) discovered that, while universities made many public commitments to expand the scholarship, many failed to follow through with policy action and/or implementation.

Faculty were not interviewed or surveyed in Glassick et al.’s study, yet such organizational approaches are often used to make inferences about faculty work. Also explaining faculty work as a function of university behaviors is James S. Fairweather’s impressive body of work. In at least two decades’ worth of research, Fairweather has used national survey data to examine the work profiles of university faculty and has repeatedly found that faculty are paid better when they yield research-related work. In a 2005 study, he found that teaching time and faculty salary were actually negatively associated. Fairweather insists that organizational leadership is largely accountable for the focus that faculty place on research (1996, 2005) and that faculty members construct their work role according to university reward systems.

Melguizo and Strober (2007) also explain faculty work by studying reward structures. They, like Fairweather, find that monetary rewards are highest when faculty are engaged in prestige yielding work, such as research, publishing, grant writing/administration, and national and professional organization membership and leadership. Melguizo and Strober suggest that, although their findings may be expected at research universities, other kinds of institutions are

rewarding faculty in similar ways. They question, “Does it make sense for all of academia, in all types of institutions, to financially reward their faculty for research? Or should the majority of institutions concentrate on teaching and reward their faculty primarily for teaching rather than for research?” (p. 665)

The question is an important one, yet it assumes that faculty members are motivated by the monetary rewards afforded to them through their work. Approaches that privilege a structural (macro or meso) standpoint color what we think about faculty and their work. Typically, such studies suggest that faculty members simply follow the cues of their organization in order to maximize personal rewards. A closer look at faculty roles reveals how faculty work is often anchored and guided by personal hopes and purposes.

Studying Faculty Work from the Micro Approach

How faculty members divide their time, understand their role, and what they most enjoy about their work are questions explored in qualitative, in-depth studies. Central to this body of literature are Neumann’s (2009) qualitative inquiries into professors’ lives. Neumann shows that faculty work can be and often is a labor of love that emanates from a personal passion, experience, or history. Neumann (2009) writes: “Through a decade of listening to university professors... I have come to understand that their construction of subject-matter knowledge is hardly free of emotion and is intimately connected with themselves” (p. 54)—whether it is the astronomer that Neumann interviewed, who connected his love of observation to a favorite childhood memory, or the literature professor whose scholarly work mirrored her personal problems and strivings. Lindholm (2003) also highlights the personal foundations of faculty work, arguing that it is important to search out the underpinnings of why faculty do what they do because professors have a hand in “shaping the character” (p. 126) of the institution. Thus, Neumann and Lindholm both start from the perspective that faculty have a personal connection to their work. Their scholarship suggests that faculty are personally and emotionally invested in their work and, thus, that they are unlikely to easily yield to organizational mandates that undermine what they see as the purposes of their work.

Neumann and Lindholm have pressed open a new line of inquiry that we are interested in. While we have learned much from the scholarship on faculty work from macro and meso level studies, we still know very little about what faculty “make” of their work environment and how they make sense of their position inside a university, especially in a university that is in transition. If faculty work is an endeavor deeply bound to a personal hopes and ambitions, then we must study how faculty negotiate a space for their work. At the same time, it is important to place faculty experiences and sense-making in a larger context. In the next section, we discuss the framework that allowed us to do this.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The questions guiding this study are underpinned by our perspective that organizational life is a constitutive process between actors in the immediate and surrounding context who produce, reproduce, learn from, use, and sometimes modify institutionalized structures, processes, and culture. Thus, we do not see faculty as empty vessels that arrive at a university to be filled with lessons, nor are they “the dopes” of social theory’s past (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). They arrive with a range of experiences and world views which are available for mobilization and navigation. In other words, faculty do not simply conform. They make sense of the structures and norms, use them, and often reproduce them as they take action, but they do this from a certain vantage point and in ways that make sense to them and to their world view.

With this perspective, we use new institutionalism (NI, hereafter), a sociological analysis of organizational behavior (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) as our theoretical framework. NI provides the kind of perspective that others have found helpful in the study of organizational behavior when researchers are interested in examining the micro behaviors within organizations.

Drawing on its social interactionist underpinnings, Brint and Karabel (1989) used NI to point out how community college leaders inserted community colleges into the post-secondary field by constructing and presenting them as the most legitimate vocational education provider. Brint and Karabel (1989) argue that the initial adoption of vocational education within the community college sector did not reflect consumer demand, nor was it a response to the demands of business. If community college leaders had been responsive to consumers, Brint and Karabel (1989)

argue, they would have allowed their organizations to stand as “feeder” or transfer schools, since the majority of students, historically and still today, enter community colleges with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution.

Functioning as “feeder” schools, however, meant that community colleges would be seen as an extension of high schools, rather than legitimate members of the more prestigious post-secondary field. Wanting their institutions to be members of the more prestigious field of higher education, community college leaders created a legitimate space for their organizations by claiming that vocational training was a distinct kind of post-secondary education that they were best positioned to provide. To legitimize this function, community college leaders adopted practices found in universities. For example, they designed curriculum, hired expert faculty, and created degrees for their programs. The use of an NI lens allows one to see that earning a space and also legitimizing that space were strategies guided by cultural norms and practices constructed by actors in the field of higher education, particularly those with the kind of prestige and legitimacy that community college leaders aspired to.

Brint and Karabel’s (1989) study is one of the few studies in which NI’s micro level capabilities are utilized. It is also a good example of how one can use one of NI’s most powerful tenets, which makes it quite distinct from the general genre of organizational theory. Specifically, Brint and Karabel (1989) point out that when organizations are situated in fields, as the community college is situated in the higher education field, the influences on organizational behavior are beyond economic and/or legal and include the cultural (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Again, these cultural influences are produced in what NI theorists refer to as the institutional field. Institutional fields include other organizations that provide similar services—organizations that have evaluative and also ranking authority in the field and organizations, like professional associations, that claim expertise on certain matters pertaining to the field (see Scott, 1983). Thus, for the higher education field, such stakeholders include other universities and colleges, accreditation and ranking bodies such as U.S. News and World Ranking, and the discipline associations, publication boards, and grant funding agencies who claim expertise in the judgment of scholarship. Taken together, these organizations adopt and name certain forms and functions as either more or less legitimate. Thus, in order to be called a university, an institution must first be recognized and legitimized by others as a university, which most often means adopting the structures, processes, and behaviors that the field’s players deem necessary (Morphew, 2009).

Because of the unique vantage point that NI offers in terms of organizational environments, the vast majority of NI work is centered on organizations’ relationships to their respective fields. Hence, Brint and Karabel’s work is among the few studies that analyze micro level behavior through an NI lens (also DiMaggio, 1991; Morphew, 2002; and Zucker, 1977). Recently, Powell and Colyvas (2008) urged NI theorists to visit the micro level of organizational behavior. They, themselves, put forward a study in which they used NI to explore how university scientists view their participation in private/corporate sponsored research. Their study illustrated that scientists have institutionalized, and thus normalized, the practice of such work by evoking language and widespread societal discourses which legitimize the merging of public and private goods (p. 288).

Powell and Colyvas (2008), as well as Brint and Karabel (1989), demonstrate how studying organizational life at a micro level, while remaining cognizant of the political, economic, but especially the cultural or institutional environment can uncover critical insights. With a nod to these scholars, we see NI as a potentially powerful lens to study faculty work at a time of mission creep.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This qualitative study is based on ten interviews, institutional documents and artifacts, and ten months of participant observation captured in field notes. For interviews, we used random stratified sampling. Specifically, we took faculty rosters listed on college websites and then randomly selected potential participants. Four tenure-track faculty from each college were sent an e-mail invitation to participate. The e-mail invitation included a generic description of the study and explained that the interview would be recorded. Those that elected to participate in our study were scheduled to be interviewed during the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008. See Table 1 for our sample description, as well as a description of each college faculty population.

Table 1***Faculty Sample & Faculty Population Characteristics by College***

College	Gender & Year on Tenure-line	Total	Tenure-line Faculty in College	Faculty Gender Entire College	Total Faculty in College
Business	Female 1 st ; Male 3 rd	2	46	22 Females; 60 Males	82
Education	Female 5 th ; Male 5 th ; Male 5 th	3	50	71 Females; 46 Males	117
Liberal Arts	Female 4 th ; Female 3 rd ; Female Tenured	3	177	185 Females; 253 Males	438
Science*	Male 2 nd ; Male 4 th	2	170	99 Females; 234 Males	303

*College of Science and College of Engineering have been combined and presented as the College of Science to represent what are referred to as the “hard sciences” (Becher, 1995). Column 2 indicates gender of faculty member and what year the professor occupied on the tenure-line at time of interview.

The ten faculty members in our sample represent a variety of points on the tenure time-line. Some faculty members had just begun their first year at Sun, while others were very near the tenure and review process. One professor had recently been promoted and was holding an important administrative position.

Interviewing tenure-track faculty was important because they represent the potential future of the professoriate at Sun University. As tenure-track faculty members, they must learn and interpret Sun’s changing mission in order to insert themselves as valuable members of the university and higher education community. Entering a university when it is undergoing significant transitions suggests that tenure-track faculty members have to work especially hard to understand the expectations they are expected to fulfill and the role they are expected to play. Studying how tenure-track faculty members navigate an organization that is shifting its mission reveals important insights about the nature of faculty work and roles at Sun now and for the future.

Interviews and Other Data Sources

The interviews were loosely structured and lasted about one hour each. With NI as our orienting framework, we were mindful of the possibility that faculty might attempt to adopt work habits similar to faculty who work in already established research universities, yet we did not impress this on our interviewees. Thus, we asked faculty to describe their work load and time allocation. We asked them to discuss their role in terms of the university mission and to elaborate, if possible, on the mission. We asked faculty to explain how they understood their role and the mission of the university upon hiring and if and how such understandings had changed. We asked faculty to explain what they knew about the transition to Tier One and how they understood the expectations, impact, and purpose of the transition. We asked faculty if the expectations of their work changed because of the transition and, if so, to explain how. We asked specifically if the tenure and promotion policies may have been revised in light of Sun’s aspirations. Of course, we asked faculty to describe any changes that they may have made to their work habits. We concluded by asking faculty for their “opinions” on the transition.

In addition to the faculty interviews, we analyzed several secondary sources dated between 2004 and 2009. Table 2 lists all of the sources used for this study.

Table 2
Data Sources

2004	Institutional Report on Sun's research strengths
2005	Fall Convocation Speech; Sun's accreditation and improvement plan
2006	Transcript of President's Speech to major grant funder; University Mission & Vision Statement
2007	Fall Convocation Speech; Local newspaper article w/ President interview; College of Business website/news release; College of Education position posting; 6/10 Interviews; Field notes
2008	Fall Convocation Speech; Sun magazine President interview; 2/10 Interviews; Field notes
2009	New Faculty Orientation; College level New Faculty Orientation; Field notes

Data Analysis

To analyze our data, we used the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 66). The first author of the paper analyzed the data set by searching for ideas, actions, and patterns related to faculty work, faculty work habits, faculty understanding of transition, and sources that faculty used for sense-making. These ideas, actions and/or patterns were coded with key words and phrases, which were defined by the author throughout the coding process. Then, these initial codes were bundled as themes during a series of bi- and tri-weekly meetings at which the second author interrogated the analysis by examining the data independently, reading drafts of the argument, and forcing the first author to explain or reconsider points. This analytical process took more than one year's worth of critical discussion, leading to the analysis we present below.

THE SETTING

This study took place at Sun University, a Hispanic-Serving¹ regional public university in the southwest. In a region of more than one million people, Sun University is the only in-state four-year public university within hundreds of miles; thus, more than 80% of Sun's students are drawn from local school districts. About 50% of Sun's students are first generation students and/or non-traditional students who come from economically poor backgrounds. Most work part-time, and many of them work full-time.

In order to serve its unique student population, administrators have sought to create a culture of student validation. Consider, for example, the President's remarks to a major grant funder in 2006:

...reaching out and mentoring and supporting and providing a little extra time and encouragement...if every faculty member models that behavior, believes that he or she can help that student achieve that goal - that gets us a long way down the road...(2006).

The notion that faculty reach out to students, build relationships with them, and "take a little extra time" are ideals that all universities promote. However, at Sun these ideas have been given real credence. For instance, in the most recent accreditation process which took place in the mid 2000's, administrators and faculty members adopted Laura Rendón's (1994) student validation theory to set up expectations for university, college, and departmental culture (Sun's Accreditation Report, 2006; Fall Convocation Speech, 2007). In general, Rendón's work asks higher education

¹ The U.S. Dept. of Education defines universities and colleges as a Hispanic Serving Institution when the student population is more than 25%.

professionals to rethink the predominant recipe for student success, to search out and identify the diverse knowledge and assets that non-traditional students, such as Sun's students, bring to the institution, and to capitalize on those inside and outside the classroom. Such work, of course, takes time and energy. Yet, Sun has nurtured and encouraged such faculty behavior for many years. In fact, these expectations are part of the everyday discourse for the Sun community and serve as a sort of "script" to help organizational members, especially faculty, make sense of their work at Sun.

Around 2004, Sun leaders introduced a new discourse. Specifically, university leaders introduced the idea that Sun University should consider itself an aspiring "Tier One" research university. Around that time, a task force studied and produced a report on Sun's research capacity. Then, in 2007, the local community newspaper published an article in which it described Sun's evolving mission. In 2008, faculty research was given a new, primary focus in the convocation speech. A few months later, the President explained the need for the transition:

...[Tier One] status will heighten the school's standing, create meaningful jobs for students and improve the city's overall economy, as the designation would produce more research programs and more well-paid professors running them...(University Magazine Interview w/ President, 2008)

While Sun's Tier One aspirations were becoming increasingly predominant in official university discourse and plans, we were carrying out our interviews. During interviews, we learned that colleges were revising or had recently revised tenure and promotion guidelines. The College of Business revised guidelines to allot more value for "juried publications" (Dr. Lopez Interview, 2007). We also learned that, in the College of Science, faculty members had begun to distinguish between grants that supported applied versus pure research, allotting more points for those grants that supported pure research (Dr. Morales Interview, Fall 2007). Furthermore, also during field work for a related project, Gonzales found that three high ranking college level administrators were sought in order to move their college and their faculty toward Tier One status (Sun's job posting website; College of Business Homepage).

Additional signs of change for faculty work expectations were evident during the 2009 New Faculty Orientation. At the presentation, liberal arts faculty members were told by a college administrator that teaching and research were no longer enough; they should expect to spend time searching for and writing grants (New Faculty Orientation College Level Meeting Field notes, 2009). The point made by the administrator suggests that though the Tier One transition and script had been launched, it did not replace Sun's student-centered, regional script.

FINDINGS

This work was intended to explore how faculty members understand and navigate an instance of mission creep. With NI as our framework, we collected data that relates to the intersection of faculty, university, and field. We were particularly interested in understanding how faculty members take agency in this situation. We begin our findings discussion by offering important contextual data regarding faculty work which seemed to provide signals to faculty about the kind of university that Sun is in terms of its daily, concrete operations. After these contextual points, we discuss our thematic analysis.

Faculty Work Load

Asked to describe their work load, faculty members described relatively high teaching loads. Two of the ten faculty members teach three courses per semester, while six faculty work in colleges where the typical teaching load is three-two. Moreover, two of these six professors have been asked to teach every summer since arriving. Dr. Stevens, a fourth year professor who had arrived in 2004 when the transition was just underway, stated "3-3 is really heavy. I've learned this semester that it is really impossible to do research [with 3 courses]. [My colleagues] say, 'It's impossible!'"

In addition to the heavy teaching load for these and the majority of Sun faculty, as described by interviewees, they also reported large class sizes, even at the graduate level. Dr. Stevens noted that she often has up to 30 students in a seminar. Dr. Levin, a third year professor in Liberal Arts, who had arrived straight out of graduate school and soon after the transition, said, "I am not a fan of larger, larger, larger classes. I mean I teach upper division, and I never have less than 80 in a senior class!" Also related to instructional responsibilities, Gonzales (2008) found that high level

university leaders oppose the use of graduate students as teaching assistants. Gonzales (2008) reports one Dean's frustrated comment: "Tier One people – they have T.A.'s doing that kind of work [teaching freshmen sections]. Do we want to do that? No - because we want 'real' faculty in the classroom, right?"

At Sun, the state of graduate education, a core character for research universities, is poor. Only 2 of the 10 faculty have steady resources for graduate assistants. Dr. Lugo, a second year Biology professor and former industry researcher, was hired at Sun to aid his department in the transition to research status. He commented on the lack of funding for graduate assistants: "The students that I have in the lab are there because they want to be.... Unfortunately, I cannot pay these students.... I try to help them get financial assistance, fellowships." An Engineering professor in his third year and fresh out of his doctoral program said that he recently secured enough external funding for graduate assistants. Dr. Levin negotiated a generous start-up package, which afforded her graduate assistants. However, the remaining six professors have no dedicated graduate students to help with research and/or teaching responsibilities.

Still other faculty members commented on lagging research infrastructure. One faculty from the College of Liberal Arts, recently tenured, but who arrived before the onset of the transition, noted, "our library – very deficient. Yes, I know inter-library loan and all that bulls---, but it takes time. People at Tier One have it there!" To put it simply, faculty members reported that Sun has failed to provide infrastructure central to a Tier One aspirant university.

Challenges related to work context go beyond poor institutional infrastructure. Most concerning is the "dissonance," as Dr. Levin calls it, between the Tier One aspiration and the lack of preparation of Sun's incoming students. To be sure, faculty members expressed confidence in the ability and work ethic of Sun students, yet they overwhelmingly acknowledged that students have difficulty with university-level work and the college transition. For example, Dr. Jones, an Education professor and former school leader, hired just before the transition, said,

[Sun students] are highly intelligent, highly capable ... they may not have had the exposure that students in a graduate program at [Flagship University] have... most of the students that go to [Flagship University] went to an exclusive school system... students here come to us from Mexico or from Honduras... Does that mean that they are less intelligent? Absolutely not! That just means that they have not had the experience... (Dr. Jones' emphasis).

The preparedness of students affects faculty research in very direct ways. Dr. Lugo, the second year biologist hired to help his department transition, said, "The lab experience that the [students] have is very poor, very poor. Sometimes they do not know... just very basic things." A self-described researcher, Dr. Lugo wants to retain good students in his lab to assist in his research. However, he admits that this has been a challenge because Sun students are not prepared and require intense support. He says,

I was expecting the students in the class to do better. I have, I have a big regret about that.... I think that one of the problems that Sun has is that the students are not very well qualified. For instance, just recently I was looking at the rate of acceptance in the school. It is 99%!

Accessibility has long been a central feature of Sun's willingness and readiness to serve the local community, yet the open access philosophy impacts faculty struggling to establish research programs and who require a skilled, prepared student body that can help.

While faculty have different views about Sun students, what was common among interviewees was the perspective that Sun's context does not reflect its Tier One aspirations. NI theorists, Meyer and Rowan (1977), help to explain this disconnect. Recall that Meyer and Rowan (1977) were the first to recognize the impact of cultural environments on organizational behavior. They wrote that an organization's formal structures and scripts "dramatically reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities" (p. 41). Thus, NI suggests that, perhaps, Sun's Tier One aspirations are an attempt to mimic rather than actually implement a more prestigious organizational form to enhance legitimacy. Whether or not the mission creep is "real," faculty consistently hear and see contradictory signals and must make sense of the ambiguity.

Based on our interviews, we found that faculty make sense of the transition by using the scripts put forward by Sun University administrators. By *script*, we refer to discourse used in public speeches, policies, and presentations about the purpose and goals of the university. Two scripts, specifically, seem to be available to faculty: the script that speaks to the university's long-held, student-centered teaching mission and the emerging Tier One script, which sig-

nals a desire for more research, status, and prestige. Using these scripts, faculty respond in three ways.

The first response that we discuss is *Owning Tier One*. Faculty who own the transition were attracted to Sun because of these aspirations. For example, Dr. Lugo said, “[Sun’s] history is a different history from now on...and I want to be part of that!” Owning Tier One is about faculty who are eager to contribute to the materialization of this script and take ownership of the transition.

Another response is *Negotiating Tier One*. Negotiators hear the Tier One messages from their deans and department chairs, from the Provost and from their colleagues, and yet they hesitate. While the tenure and promotion policy process weighs heavily on these faculty, they negotiate what their role will be based on organizational demands, but also in light of their own personal views.

Finally, *Resisting Tier One* entails accounts of the ways that faculty have resisted the Tier One script. Resisters take pieces of the university’s expiring student validation script and mobilize it in order to bring legitimacy and sense to their work.

Owning Tier One

Half of the faculty interviewees were hired at a time when the transition had not quite been launched; however, the others were recruited or applied precisely because of Sun’s Tier One aspirations. For example, Dr. Lopez, a former industry researcher, said, “[My position] is a research oriented position, my main responsibility will be to conduct research and to publish, of course...I knew it from the interview...I wanted to make sure that I was in the right place.” Dr. Lopez, a first year Business professor, owns the Tier One script and is anxious to contribute to its realization.

Even owners of the script have to deal with the lagging infrastructure at Sun, but they have managed to secure conditions favorable for their success. For instance, Dr. Lopez described how she negotiated a reduced teaching load consisting of two courses per semester and made sure that she would retain the same courses over time in order to reduce preparation time. She said, “I will only be teaching two classes a semester...because my main orientation will be research.... Service has been reduced for two years” The savvy to negotiate is a reflection of one’s preparation, but it also suggests that some faculty come to the university with a stronger research orientation.

Owning the transition is not only about faculty who want to work in a research oriented university, but it is about how these faculty construct actions to protect their future as “researchers” in spite of serious organizational dissonance and contradictions. Consider third year professor, Dr. Levin, who said, “I came here with a research focus.... I didn’t want to go to a place with more teaching. I am a researcher.... [The changing mission] fit perfectly with [me].” To protect her time, Dr. Levin attempts to compete for grants that will support her work:

I compete for every intramural [fund] here [at Sun].... What I need is support for my graduate students. And I am not finding that.... Now, I am lucky in some ways, because I got my lab, so I am able to always collect data, but I am not able to fully support my students yet...which is important for someone without tenure.

Dr. Levin is clear about her role as a faculty member, and although she is sharply critical of Sun’s lagging infrastructure, she does not grapple with the tension between Sun’s old and new missions. Instead, she strives to create conditions that will facilitate her career as a successful researcher and draws from the institutionalized meaning of professorial work in research universities. Owners of the Tier One script, like Dr. Levin, see it as a signal to adopt the habits and practices of already established professors who work in legitimate research universities.

Similarly, Dr. Lugo, a self-described researcher and second year professor, explained how he organizes his work: “First things first. If I have a grant to write...if I am here in my office, I close the door.” Business professor, Dr. Lopez echoed Dr. Lugo’s perspective:

You have to tell the students you have your office hours and they can come [then].... I tell my students: Don’t expect me to answer your e-mails on the weekend because I am not even going to!.... These are things you do to help you manage your time. I think it’s tricky because teaching can take all of your time if you don’t put a stop to it.

Closing one’s doors to students who require additional assistance does not seem problematic to these faculty members because they simply do not conceptualize teaching as the primary function of their role. While it is wise for



tenure-track faculty to schedule and be protective of their time, in years past, the President stressed that faculty must be ready and willing to work closely with students if they hoped to be successful at Sun.

As we move on to Negotiating Tier One, we find that other faculty from the same colleges make sense of their situation in quite different ways. Most faculty who “negotiate” the script were attracted to Sun’s mission as a teaching-focused, regional university. While Owners of the transition negotiate the context and constraints at Sun, our second group of faculty negotiate the Tier One script. To put it simply, the Negotiators in our sample negotiate because the work they associate with the Tier One transition is not the work they signed up for.

Negotiating Tier One

Negotiating is about professors’ struggles to reconcile different organizational scripts. This struggle emanates from their personal preference to teach and serve students as a primary function of their work. Faculty who negotiate Tier One realize that they must craft a rigorous research program, yet they tend to favor the teaching and service component of their work. For example, Dr. Stevens explains that working at Sun “goes along with my changing aspirations about my career.” After completing her doctoral work, Dr. Stevens spent several years conducting research and publishing. She saw Sun as an opportunity to focus on teaching.

In general, what is most problematic for Negotiators is figuring out how to balance the Tier One research expectations that administrators continuously stress with their personal desire to be deeply engaged in teaching. For example, Dr. Morales, a first generation college graduate, commented:

[The transition] can be challenging because I feel like I am a student-oriented person, and I enjoy mentoring students, and that’s a big part of why I wanted to join academe. Umm...but I also realize where the university is going, so the challenge is for me is making sure that I have enough serious and quality research programs so that I can be successful through the tenure and promotion process.

Coping with research expectations that he did not expect, Dr. Morales negotiates the constraints of the transition. Referring to a grant that he was recently awarded which enabled him to work with undergraduates, Dr. Morales said, “One of things that I am really happy [about] this semester is to have undergraduates assist me.... I hadn’t really had any time to mentor any students.... [Now] I have an opportunity to mentor students while at the same time fulfilling this research agenda.”

Like Dr. Morales, Dr. Jones, an Education professor, is deeply dedicated to teaching. As former K-12 leader, he is especially committed to local education issues. Of the shifting mission, he says,

I think that it becomes very obvious...that research and writing is number one and you better make that your focus immediately.... At the same time, I believe that teaching is a very critical component [of faculty work]. And sometimes, I think that in pursuit of “Tier One status”... that teaching is back-burner[ed], that it is pushed to the side. And I don’t know if there is anything more important, than that one-on-one relationship.

To manage the increased research expectations related to Tier One, Dr. Jones merges his teaching and research.

Education professor and former school teacher, Dr. White, blends her work out of necessity. Frustrated, she said:

They have changed the rules on a bunch of us.... When we came [Sun] was not trying to be a Tier One...and, so here, you know, I am here for like two years. Well you know all of a sudden...by the way, we are trying to be a Tier One University...and so then I have about three or four years to write enough articles...

Dr. White described her diligent efforts to combine teaching, research, and service. For example, she discussed how she introduced a group of graduate students to research conferences:

We’re sitting there in the audience and they said: ‘Okay all the graduate students from [Sun] stand up!’ And my class...stood up.... We had a dean there to see it.... She was pretty impressed—that is the kind of service that pays back!

Making sense of and framing her work as a legitimate contribution, Dr. White accounts for both organizational scripts and pieces them together. Introducing the students to a research conference was an example of teaching and mentoring. Simultaneously, Dr. White’s own participation in the conference was a scholarly activity.

Another particularly powerful way that a number of faculty negotiate Tier One is by grounding their research in the local community. Dr. Rivera, a former researcher in the K-12 sector, refers to this approach as an attempt to “rescue local knowledge.” He suggests that when institutions of higher education become more responsive to larger, wider audiences, rather than the local community they serve, there is a “homogenization of knowledge.” As a negotiator, Dr. Rivera has several critiques regarding the university’s Tier One aspirations; however, he merges the two scripts to frame his work as sensible and legitimate. On the one hand, Dr. Rivera serves the local community as he leads several research projects connected to local public education, public health, and environmental issues in the area. Yet, his locally grounded work allows him to seek grants and produce scholarship.

Dr. Rivera clearly takes agency over his work. By merging the Tier One script with Sun’s former and expiring script, he manages to frame his work as a contribution. Goffman (1967) referred to such acts of agency as “saving face.” Goffman argues that individuals engage in a daily round of impression management, presenting him[her]self to advantage when able... “employing deference and demeanor... *being continuously alive to the requirements of behavior in public places*” (Goffman, 1967, cited in Appelrouth & Edles, 2008, p. 509, our emphasis).

Although Dr. Rivera sees and experiences discordance between the emerging Tier One script and the student-centered script of the university, he is “alive” to the requirements that emanate from the institutional field, as our framework NI would predict. Thus, he mimics, to a certain extent, what is expected of faculty at a research university, but he also negotiates those expectations by referring back to and mobilizing the script that administrators institutionalized over several years and made available for sense-making.

As Owners and Negotiators mobilize and use the two scripts to make sense of the transition and frame their work, their identity as primarily a teacher or researcher disposes them to mix and merge the scripts in ways that make sense to them. For instance, on the one hand, Owners protect their scholarly career from the institutionalized organizational script that reflects Sun’s history as an open-access, regional, and student-centered university. They do this by using the Tier One script, referring to the field of higher education for an institutionalized prescription of legitimate faculty work roles in research universities. On the other hand, Negotiators reconcile between the organizational script that attracted them to Sun in the first place and the Tier One script, which they believe threatens the regional, teaching mission.

In both cases, we see how faculty members shape daily organizational life—how they legitimize their work in a situation that has been defined for them with through institutionalized scripts. Particularly compelling is how we see institutionalized scripts “picked up” and transposed in ways that “afford considerable latitude for human agency and interpretation” (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 277). We see that scripts, such as Tier One or student validation, can be used as materials for sense-making, framing, and legitimizing one’s actions.

Resisting Tier One

Resisting Tier One took form in different ways, but all forms were anchored in Sun’s student-validation script. Faculty resisters and would-be resisters were highly critical of the transition and suggested that they were unwilling to conform to it. Resistant comments and actions were isolated, but such instances offer important insights. The fact that resistance even emerged amongst our small sample heightens interest for future research. Dr. Stevens, a professor in Liberal Arts, discussed the most concrete example of resistance. With a 3-3 load and intense service commitments, research does not sit high on her priority list. To this end, Dr. Stevens expressed that she has been misled:

About tenure: as I said, I go up next year.... So, I am a little worried about the research grant thing. That I don’t have grants...that’s an institutional expectation that I didn’t realize at first. But, to tell the truth, I’m not really that willing to adapt to it.

While Dr. Stevens is surprised at the transition and is also deeply concerned about how a Tier One might impact Sun’s regional mission, she, like the other faculty who negotiate Tier One, was attracted to Sun because of its pronounced commitment to teaching and community service. She admits, “You know, I could put less time into my teaching, but it’s one of my favorite parts of my job, and so I don’t. I like the teaching side, so I do that.”

The student-centered script helps Dr. Stevens frame her resistance while her sense of who she is as a scholar solidifies it. Unwilling to “conform,” Dr. Stevens mobilized key phrases from the old script to legitimize her position.

She explains:

I know [Sun] has this aspiration to become this Tier One research institution, but I hope that, if and when they do that, it doesn't mean that teaching becomes like the poor step-child, you know because that's often what happens.... I think it's really Sun's strength...is that it produces middle level professionals for this region. That's an important function!

Also committed to Sun's regional mission is Dr. Morales, who arrived at Sun just as the transition was launched. He mobilizes the old script to frame his approach to faculty work:

I believe that [Sun] serves a really unique role here; we live in a community where the level of education is fairly low, and so we are taking many people who have never even dreamed that they could get a Ph.D.!.... We are showing them that their dream is possible, even beyond what they thought was possible.... The truth is, we're very successful at taking students that may not be accepted at other universities or other programs and making them very successful.

Skeptically, Dr. Morales says, "It's a balance that [we're] playing. I think clearly we'd be naïve to believe that we will become a research institution without maintaining the student friendliness and the student support that we are known for." If Sun fails to maintain its student-centered character, including the fact that it is a relatively accessible institution, Dr. Morales is likely to resist. He concluded, "If we begin turning away really good people that shouldn't be turned away... [pause] that goes against my grain!"

DISCUSSION

Our study shows that while faculty members use organizational scripts, which consist of the history, discourse, and ideas that administrators have used to describe the university's purpose, they tinker with the scripts enough to make sense of and bring legitimacy to their work. Whether faculty's tinkering with or resisting the script is consistent enough to change the course of Sun University is not a question we can answer at this time, given the exploratory nature of our study. However, the data that we collected shows that faculty's personal views of their work are important to how they mobilize and use the scripts to frame their work and take action.

Perhaps Negotiators will yield a different kind of Research University where student validation and regional groundedness define faculty work rather than the dominant prescription that the field offers. Examining mission creep at the micro level has allowed us to see how faculty Negotiators are attempting to create a niche, and that they strive to legitimize this niche by merging scripts from the important institutional field as well as the organization.

However, most NI theorists would predict that if creep continues, the university will revise tenure and promotion policies in more systematic ways rather than allowing colleges to patch together new standards, as was the case at the time of the interviews. Specifically, the tenure process, NI theory suggests, is likely to become driven by the standards that serve at other research universities.

To this end, at the writing of this paper, we have learned that one of the Negotiators, Dr. White, was denied tenure because of a "lack of scholarly productivity." Another Negotiator struggled in a fight for tenure, as the tenure and promotion committee was skeptical of the scholarship he produced, given its localized focus and the fact that a number of manuscripts were published by a Spanish language press. Moreover, Dr. Stevens, the most ardent resistor, was recently awarded tenure. In a follow-up interview, she noted that she joined a writing group and began to produce more scholarship. She also admitted that, during her final year on the tenure-track, she "gave in" and wrote a grant for a research program where she plans to investigate an array of cross-cutting socio-economic issues in the community.. Dr. Jones was awarded tenure and noted no problems. Perhaps, it is because he managed to produce scholarship based on his teaching. The Owners of Tier One came amid the transition and have yet to be evaluated for tenure, with the exception of Dr. Levin, who is now one of Sun's tenured and most celebrated researchers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We listened to faculty and demonstrated how organizational actors picked up ideas, or as we refer to them “scripts,” in order to make sense, construct, and legitimize their daily work. We recommend that administrators account for the various scripts which they have put forward to characterize their university. These scripts are not easily washed out. Organizational members use such scripts for learning, for navigating, and they become institutionalized norms or understandings that can be accessed at times of pronounce flux. When faculty mobilize scripts and organize actions, the hopes that they had for their professorial work anchors this process.

This leads us to a second recommendation. Throughout our investigation, we learned that the Tier One plan was crafted almost entirely by administrators; yet, the shift in mission involves and demands the work of faculty. As organizational scholars have noted for years, if a change is to be successful, members must feel ownership (Kezar, 2001) and should be included in such discussions.

Finally, we believe it is worthwhile for universities in similar positions to Sun’s to ask faculty members what they believe their work is about, what they see as their strengths, and how they can contribute to the mission. Universities that have engaged their faculty in such processes eventually created two tiers of faculty: one for faculty who teach and the other for faculty who conduct research (see O’Meara and Rice, 2005). In other words, we believe it is worthwhile for a university to “get to know” its faculty better prior to such dramatic transitions.

Ultimately, we suggest that the university must work harder to make this process less ambiguous and confront the contradictions that it has created. The university is responsible for ensuring that its scholars, all of whom they hired and brought into a complex situation, have the opportunity to succeed.

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Leslie D. Gonzales, Ed.D. (leslieg@clemson.edu) is an Assistant Professor at Clemson University in the Department of Leadership, Counselor, Human and Organizational Development. Leslie completed her doctoral degree at University of Texas El Paso in 2010. Her research interests include the professoriate, sense-making, organizational change, and qualitative methods.

Rodolfo Rincones, Ph.D. (rrincones@utep.edu) is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Education Leadership and Foundations at the University of Texas El Paso. Rodolfo's research interests include globalization, the political economy of higher education, social and union movements amongst educators, and evaluation research.